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**Pattern of conferences**

# Pattern of conferences

## Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

## I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/72/116). In addition, the Committee had before it the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2017 (A/72/32), which includes the text of a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences in annex I. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 4 October 2017.

2. The report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/262 and other relevant mandates and contains information on matters relating to meetings management and documents management in 2016, together with cost-efficiency initiatives and cross-cutting issues. **The Advisory Committee notes that resources are not requested in connection with the report and there are no immediate financial implications resulting from it.**

## II. Meetings management

### Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

3. In paragraphs 10 to 24 of his report, the Secretary-General provides an overview of the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities. It is indicated that the total number of meetings held at the four duty stations in 2016 decreased by 5 per cent compared with 2015, from 36,316 to 34,604. The 2015 figure reflects an exceptional spike in the volume of meetings, generated by the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, the events held that year to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, additional meetings approved by the General Assembly in

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resolution 68/268 and an intense programme of meetings on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in preparation for the signing of the Paris Agreement in November 2015.

4. The Secretary-General indicates that to provide a full picture of the utilization of conference-servicing resources, the report was prepared using the methodology developed in 2015 which broadens the scope of reporting beyond the core sample to report on the formal meetings of all calendar bodies at all four duty stations using a six-year cycle (A/72/116, fig. III). It is also indicated that this methodology makes it possible to address underutilization more broadly and to achieve greater efficiencies across all intergovernmental bodies. As in 2015, the overall utilization of allocated meeting services in 2016 was 80 per cent. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the utilization of conference-servicing resources at all four duty stations. With regard to the utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Committee was informed that the utilization of a specific conference room that had been physically converted into a courtroom and was assigned permanently to the United Nations Dispute Tribunal was recorded at 100 per cent utilization because of the room being dedicated to that particular purpose. The Committee was also informed that the actual utilization rate was 7.2 per cent based on the technical services provided by the Office for the court hearings, and that the conference room could not be used for other purposes. **In this regard, the Committee is of the view that, irrespective of the physical layout of the room, the United Nations Office at Nairobi should use it for meetings other than those of the Dispute Tribunal that could be accommodated within its physical structure.**

**Integrated global management rule**

5. The Secretary-General indicates that in 2016, the application of the integrated global management rule resulted in notional savings of $1,855,610 for both regular budget and extrabudgetary activities (A/72/116, fig. VI). It is indicated that compared with 2015, which resulted in savings of $950,313, the significantly higher savings were mainly a result of the higher number of conferences held away from established headquarters in 2016 (35) than in 2015 (27) (ibid., para. 22). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that as the notional savings were accrued to the host countries or other international or regional organizations that requested services from the United Nations, the amounts are not reviewed by an oversight body. It is also indicated in the report that the additional workload of coordinating and servicing such meetings held away from established headquarters is usually not reflected as additional costs to the United Nations. **In this regard, the Committee looks forward to seeing further developments in the quantification of the costs, and related savings to host countries or other international or regional organizations, relating to the additional workload of coordinating and servicing such meetings.**

**Accessibility**

6. In paragraphs 53 to 55 of his report, the Secretary-General provides an overview of activities and initiatives related to the accessibility of persons with disabilities to conference services and facilities. These include the provision of sign language interpretation services and real-time speech-to-text captioning at meetings, and the provision of Braille embossing of documentation in New York through the Accessibility Centre. It also included lending assistive devices to meeting participants from its stock at the Accessibility Centre at Headquarters, operating a temporary accessibility kiosk in the lobby at the visitors' entrance during the main part of the General Assembly session, and taking steps to standardize the planning

and recruitment of sign language interpretation teams to service the meetings entitled to sign interpretation and to increase the pool of qualified sign language interpreters. The Secretary-General indicates that he is committed to mainstreaming accessibility considerations within the work and operations of the Secretariat and that a course would be charted towards improving the accessibility of conference services at all four duty stations based on a common approach, including common technological arrangements and formats, operating standards, costing models, conditions of service and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The Advisory Committee makes further comments and recommendations on the issue of accessibility in its report on the fifteenth annual progress report on the implementation of the capital master plan (A/72/536).

## III. Matters relating to translation, interpretation and staffing

### Staffing

7. The Secretary-General describes a number of measures introduced in 2016 aimed at replenishing the rosters of language posts, including recruitment testing, expanded outreach efforts to potential recruits and training of potential recruits through internships and traineeships, as well as increased use of social media and an enhanced social media presence (A/72/116, paras. 43–50). The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in addressing the staffing and succession planning challenges of the Department.

8. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Department has been active in fulfilling its personnel needs. The Committee was provided with an update, upon enquiry, regarding the outposting of five staff from the French Translation Service in New York to Vienna for a pilot period of two years beginning in the third quarter of 2016 (A/71/116, para. 56). The Committee was informed that the pilot arrangement involved outposting five posts (2 P-5, 1 P-4 and 2 P-3) from New York for an initial period of two years beginning 1 August 2016. The projected savings for the biennium 2016–2017 amount to approximately $85,000. The Committee recalls that the arrangement was intended to help address the vacancy rate in the Service, generate cost-efficiencies and increase the mobility of language staff (A/71/116, para. 56). The Committee was informed that while the project had achieved its main goal of staff retention in a year when five Senior Revisers (P-5) in New York had retired, a number of challenges were experienced, including depletion of the team in New York of much needed managerial capacity. The pilot will be reviewed six months before its expiration.

9. In terms of the status of the selection and recruitment of translators with one foreign language, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that during the 2016 examination for the recruitment of Spanish translators, the requirement for a second language other than English was waived for candidates with a diploma in translation, while candidates with other diplomas were tested in English and a second foreign language. This exceptional measure was taken to expand the pool of candidates from Latin America, as mandated in General Assembly resolutions, including resolutions 70/9, para. 112, and 71/267, para. 116. The Committee was also informed that, in preparation for this examination, which was the first fully remote examination to be held, the Spanish Translation Service in New York had organized an intensive social media campaign and had sought support from the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, thus obtaining contacts in universities in Latin America and promoting the language examination through official channels. The effort yielded 4,777 applicants, 58 per cent of whom (2,775

applicants) were from Latin America, compared with 19 per cent (178 applicants) in the previous examination. Of these, 3,569 applicants met the requirements and were invited to take the written examination, in which 33 candidates were successful and were invited to an interview. The final roster comprised 27 candidates, of whom 22 per cent (six candidates) are from Latin America, compared with 5 per cent (one candidate) in the previous examination. By October 2017, six successful candidates had been recruited (five at United Nations Headquarters in New York and one at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) and one additional recruitment is under way at the United Nations Office at Geneva. Of the successful candidates, only two do not have a second foreign language and they have been informed that they need to acquire a second language, in particular Arabic or Russian, through the United Nations language courses. This goal will be monitored in their performance evaluation for the 2018–2019 and subsequent performance cycles.

**Multilingualism**

10. The Secretary-General indicates that as the simultaneous distribution of documents is one of the pillars of multilingualism, the Department introduced a new reporting template and definitions for compiling simultaneous distribution statistics that will facilitate the monitoring of this indicator (A/72/116, para. 31). Further developments concerning this requirement with regard to the United Nations Journal are also described in the report (ibid., para. 62). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that following the submission of the report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism (A/71/757) to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, the Assembly had adopted resolution 71/328 on multilingualism, pursuant to which a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General on the full implementation of the Assembly's resolutions on multilingualism in the Organization will be issued at the seventy-third session. The Committee is looking forward to reviewing the forthcoming report.

**Verbatim reporting**

11. In paragraph 23 of his report, the Secretary-General provides information relating to the number of verbatim records produced by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. It is indicated that the number remained relatively high at 435, compared with 439 in 2015 and 438 in 2014, and that while the number of meetings entitled to verbatim records had remained relatively stable, their length had increased together with the number of words to be recorded in the verbatim records (A/72/116, para. 23).

**Documents processing**

12. The Secretary-General provides information relating to productivity, the workload of revisers and workload sharing (A/72/116, paras. 37–40). The Advisory Committee was provided with information, upon request, relating to the text-processing productivity at each of the four duty stations, and notes the lower rate of productivity in the United Nations Office at Nairobi measured in terms of words processed. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the low rate of compliance with productivity measured in terms of words processed is because the text processors in Nairobi are also engaged in several non-typing functions, including proofreading, desktop publishing and general administrative tasks, thereby ensuring the efficient management of the documentation processing pipeline.

13. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the methodology regarding productivity measurement needs to be modified in order to exclude other duties performed by staff that affect the levels of text-processing productivity, and trusts that the Department will modify the methodology accordingly.**

14. In his report, the Secretary-General provides information on the use, process of improvements and functionality of the in-house designed computer-assisted translation tool eLUNa (A/72/116, paras. 33 and 34) and the development of the e-deleGATE portal (ibid., para. 52). It is indicated that the use of eLUNa increased at all duty stations and across all language combinations by 65 per cent in 2016 and that at the end of the year, the tool was being used by approximately 1,200 internal, temporary and contractual translators and verbatim reporters. Improvements in 2016 included the integration of a powerful tool for making advanced, customized searches in the global document repository and the deployment in mid-2017 of a new interface for editors that automatically verifies the use of the official terminology contained in the UNTERM terminology portal, which allows editors to process documents more efficiently with a focus on improving the quality and readability of the original language version.

15. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the cost parameters for the production of documents in the period 2015–2017 and was informed that variations in the cost parameters were the result of a change in the calculation methodology, whereby the four duty stations use a new methodology that allows for comparative analysis. The new methodology is based on deriving costing parameters from the actual workload and expenditure data for the nearest closed financial period and excluding indirect costs, such as managerial costs, planning and reporting services costs, and administrative overhead. The Committee was also informed that the impact of new technologies, in particular eLUNa, was not specifically factored into the calculation of cost parameters.

16. With respect to the cost parameters for the production of a United Nations document and for interpretation into the six United Nations official languages, the Advisory Committee was, upon enquiry, provided with detailed information on such costs in 2017 (see annex). With respect to interpretation costs, the Committee was informed that the related costs were calculated on a daily basis, that is, not on the basis of the number of meetings.

17. **The Advisory Committee commends the Secretary-General for internally developed technological initiatives and expects that further updates regarding the development of eLUNa, the e-deleGATE portal and the integration of cost benefits into the cost parameters for the production of documents and for interpretation into the six United Nations official languages will be provided in the next report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences.**

18. **Subject to its comments in the paragraphs above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

# Annex

## Cost parameters related to documentation and meeting services in 2017

### Production of one United Nations document in 2017

(United States dollars)

| | *New York* | | *Geneva* | | *Vienna* | | *Nairobi* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *8,500 words, 26 pages* | *10,700 words, 32 pages* | *8,500 words, 26 pages* | *10,700 words, 32 pages* | *8,500 words, 26 pages* | *10,700 words, 32 pages* | *8,500 words, 26 pages* | *10,700 words, 32 pages* |
| Cost of one document[a] | 27 800 | 34 800 | 32 200 | 40 300 | 28 100 | 35 200 | 25 400 | 32 000 |

[a] The cost of processing one document includes costs related to translation, revision, text-processing and editing, as well as printing and distribution.

### Meeting services in 2017

(United States dollars)

| | *New York* | *Geneva* | *Vienna* | *Nairobi* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost of one meeting/day/six official languages[a] | 12 000 | 13 100 | 13 000 | 18 300 |

[a] Total cost for one meeting/day covering the six United Nations official languages.